

Role of povidone-iodine gargles in COVID-19 pandemic and a ray of hope for future

Behera *et al.*^[1] outlined the strategies to protect health workforce during COVID-19 pandemic. An important point worth discussing is povidone-iodine gargles in reducing transmission of COVID-19 infection. In this context, I would like to share my personal experience with povidone-iodine gargles and how this has the potential to have an everlasting benefit in future epidemics.

I have a deviated nasal septum which led to repeated episodes of upper respiratory infections (URI) for the last 40 years. The episodes would mostly get superinfected and end up as a bacterial URI. Mild post-nasal drip would persist throughout the year. Though seemingly innocuous, experiencing 2-3 debilitating episodes of URI per year had been a tormenting experience for me.

Then, in February 2020, I developed periodontal pocket for which I was recommended chlorhexidine mouth-rinses. Incidentally, a new episode of typical URI was starting at that time and I performed chlorhexidine gargles along with mouth wash. To my pleasant surprise, the next day morning, the developing URI, instead of following its usual cascade, had almost resolved. This was a heartening observation. Then I found evidence highlighting benefits of chlorhexidine and povidone-iodine gargles in reducing viral load in COVID-19 patients.^[2-5]

I started doing povidone-iodine gargles after conducting surgery especially on COVID-19 positive patients. I also immediately performed these gargles whenever the routine URI started developing (irritation and soreness in the throat).

It has been the first year in last 40 years when I did not develop a single episode of URI. This was a huge relief for me. This happened because a single povidone-iodine gargle can kill 99.99% of corona virus and other viruses within 30 seconds of contact.^[3] Not only, all the episodes of URI have been prevented, but even the low-grade smoldering postnasal drip troubling for several years has been almost cured. This could possibly

be due to elimination of pathogenic bacterial reservoir in the oropharynx. I could never imagine that a pandemic can even has such a positive impact in my life.

Even if, povidone-iodine mouth-rinses may not kill all the corona virus in the throat but it is expected to decrease the viral load substantially.^[3] The decreased load has been shown to have an impact on the severity of the disease and the final outcome.^[5] Moreover, even after six decades of usage, the resistance by microorganisms to povidone-iodine has been minimal.^[4] Therefore, it is possible, that regular mouth-rinses with povidone-iodine may ultimately prove to be simple, economical, and one of the effective ways to counter this pandemic. If this proves true, then it will be a major boon as along with the present pandemic, this step will be helpful in most future pandemics (and epidemics). Because most of the epidemics and pandemics are caused by airborne microbes (SARS, influenza, MERS, etc.), and throat is their first major halting station. *While a vaccine would help control only the present pandemic, povidone-iodine gargles would be a useful tool in the armamentarium of physicians in all times to come!*

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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